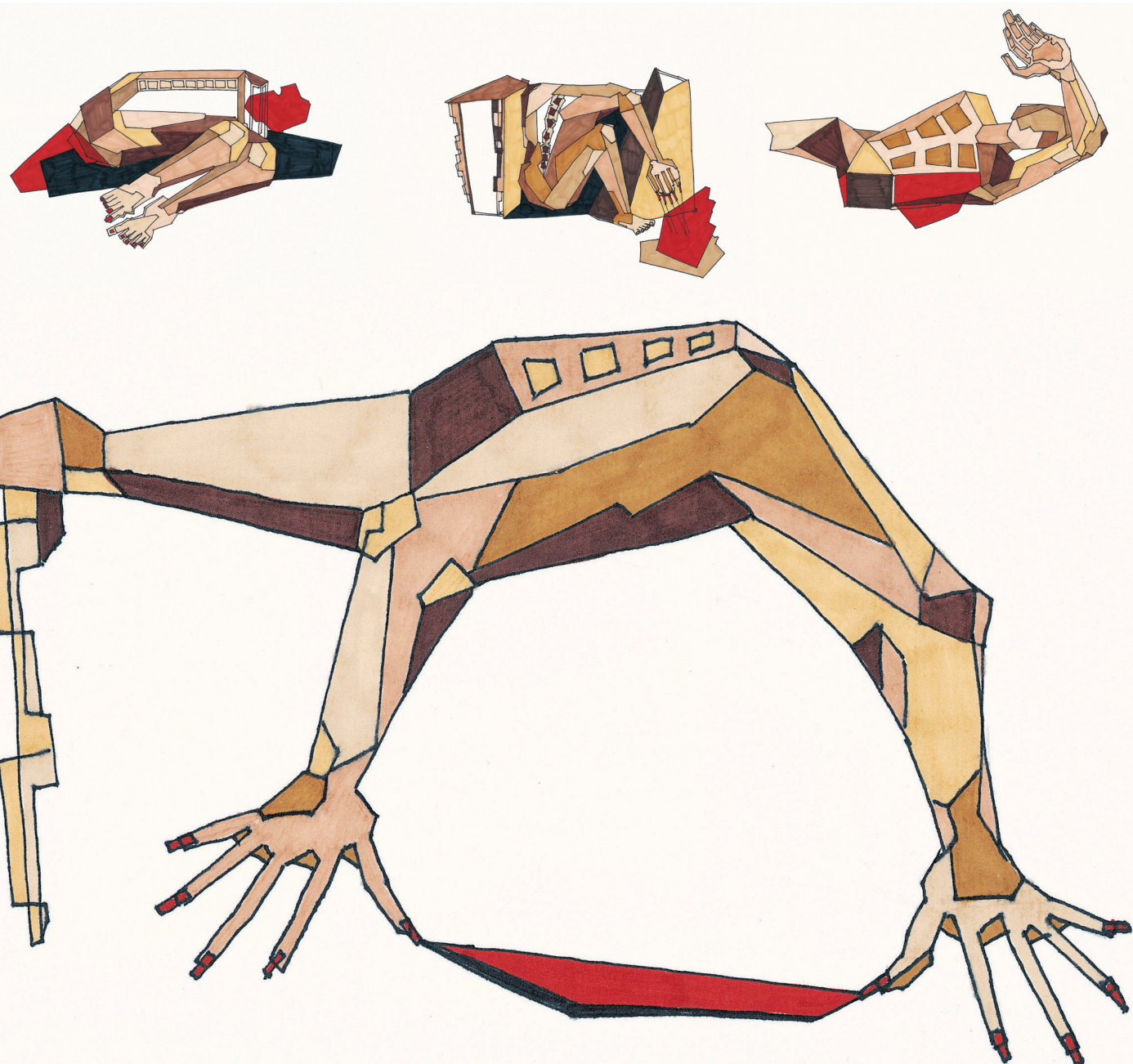


# WHAT DOES SHOCK LOOK LIKE?

Since 7 October, Israeli artists have been grappling with how to portray the terrible events of that day, and the ensuing war in Gaza. **Peter Watts** speaks to Shirel Horovitz to hear how artists are responding to the attacks and their aftermath



Aza's Guernica by Raida Adon  
Below: 7 October by Maayan Guri;  
Left: artwork by Shirel Horovitz from the series After

In the first week of October 2023, Shirel Horovitz had been in Tunisia, visiting a friend and fellow artist. She'd arrived back in Israel on 5 October and was beginning to get back into her Tel Aviv life when, on the morning of 7 October, she was awoken at 6.30am by the sound of sirens. She, along with the rest of the country, soon understood that something uniquely awful was taking place, but it has taken weeks and months to process the emotions from that terrible day. When she eventually started to reflect on those feelings, it was natural to do it through the medium of art.

Horovitz, who specialises in installations that incorporate etchings, sculptures, video and sound, usually avoided referring to contemporary events in her art immediately after they happened. But after picking up her sketchbook in late November, she began to produce work irrevocably linked to the Hamas attack. "The first thing I did was take a marker and fill a page with red," she says. "I was guided by a need for movement, to do something. I'd never really used red before but from

then on, I didn't put the red marker down." In the months that followed, Horovitz gathered work by other artists responding to the attacks, eventually compiling an online presentation, What Does Shock Look Like. The images were stark and powerful.

One painting, Curving Road by Ziva Jelin, was created before 7 October and shows a landscape saturated in red. Jelin lived on Kibbutz Be'eri and the painting was in her studio there when

Hamas attacked, killing 112 residents. The canvas now features bullet holes and shrapnel damage across its surface. Other works contemplate Israel's military response, such as Urban Planning by

Daniel Shohan, or Aza's Guernica [Gaza's Guernica] by the Palestinian and Israeli artist Raida Adon. A piece by Oren Fischer reflects on how Israeli artists felt they were perceived by the international community.

Now, some of Horovitz's work and that of other artists featured in her presentation is being shown in an exhibition, October Seventh, which is curated by Carmit Blumensohn at Anu Museum of The Jewish People In Tel Aviv.

**"The first thing I did was take a marker and fill a page with red"**



**PETER WATTS:** What was the art scene like in Israel before 7/10?

**SHIREL HOROVITZ:** Israeli artists do thought-provoking, interesting, dramatic and tragic very well, but we aren't so good at light, fun or comic. The political aspect is always present.

Before last October, artists were engaging with the political atmosphere, in particular, the protests against judicial



# ART WORLD P.O.V



Clockwise: Art World POV by Oren Fischer; War Diary series by Emi Sfar: '12.11.23 We sewed life-saving vests. When we moved onto pro-combat projects it stuck in my throat...', '13.11.23 I woke up early in the morning from the hum of a mosquito that turned into this hum in the sky that appeared with the outbreak of the war. Then I thought about all of those who wake up from a different hum'

in an image everything happens simultaneously. For me, that is truer to reality – we experience many things at once. The work by Adi Drimer speaks to that. [Her work shows the messages from a What's App group of Kibbutz Re'im residents as the attacks were happening, arranged as a spiral of words.] It is hard to read because you need to turn the page or turn yourself, and that reflects the lack of clarity, order and sense of what was going on. There was also a need to document the attacks as they happened.

**PW:** Some of the art seems to be intended for an internal audience – often using Hebrew – while some is for the world outside Israel ...

**SH:** Many people outside Israel don't fully realise what happened here, and many people in Israel don't fully realise what is going on in Gaza. The art community has, for many decades, belonged to both communities – the national and the international. But now the Israeli art world is experiencing a rift with the international art world, which it has always seen itself being part of.

It brings disillusion on so many levels. There is the disillusion that we are safe and strong, which is felt by the whole country, but there's also the disillusion about what peace now looks like.

**PW:** Can art be used to explore some of those grey areas?

**SH:** There is no grey area about what happened on 7 October and there is no grey area about what is happening in Gaza now. There is a constant pressure to sound balanced – I feel that myself. But art is a moment when somebody is expressing themselves from one specific point of view at a specific point in time. Art has permission to do that.

**PW:** How has your own work changed since those initial drawings – are you still using red?

**SH:** The drawings came out and out and then they stopped. I am waiting to see what will come next. I don't know what that will be. That is always true – as an artist and a human being. It feels even more so today. ■

October Seventh is running at ANU Museum of the Jewish People. [anumuseum.org.il](http://anumuseum.org.il). Peter Watts is a journalist and author. His latest book is Denmark Street: London's Street of Sound, Paradise Road, 2023.

overhaul [the year-long protests across Israel against the government bill that sought to curb the power of the Supreme Court]. When protests broke out along Tel Aviv's Ayalon Highway, dozens of artists painted a series of fists along the highway's embankment. Artists from the religious right approached this from the opposite direction: reflecting opposition to the disengagement from Gaza in 2005 and the desire to change the judicial system that (partly) stemmed from this. An exhibition at Geula Gallery in Jerusalem, called Fractures, was illustrating this right up to 7 October.

**PW:** When did you start noticing that art was being influenced by the events of 7 October?

**SH:** Soon afterwards, I noticed a flood of images on social media engaging with what was going on alongside art initiatives to support those in need, such as fundraising, offering art classes and alternative gallery spaces for the artists affected by the attacks.

**PW:** Which themes began to emerge?

**SH:** I noticed that artists were depicting the need to keep their hands moving. They were using things you find at home, such as marker pens or embroidery thread. The works were small, intricate and

time-consuming, for example Daniella Meller's piece, I Saw Cows Walking Among The Bodies, which is embroidered on delicate gauze bandage. It was as if artists wanted to have their hands busy to quieten their minds and hearts.

There were also lots of art history references, including Picasso's Guernica, which was reimagined in Israeli Guernica by the Ukrainian artist Zoya Cherkassky.

Perhaps Israeli artists needed to place themselves within a historical story: we are often preoccupied with questions about where we belong. Are we part of the international art world or are we a part of our national story?

Many of the works took the form of a diary or daily task, such as the series of images by Emi Sfar. These were about being repetitive, marking the days, bringing order during a time of chaos.

**PW:** One piece created after October was a work by Shai Yehezkeili, where a classical landscape is obscured by an abstract burst of red.

**SH:** Its title is Bus Explosion. It is a very powerful work referencing the terror attacks on buses in Israel [mostly by Hamas] of the early 2000s. It acknowledges the way accumulated trauma surfaces as well as the ongoing need for order, and to understand that the current war did not come out of nowhere.

**PW:** Tell me about the works that came out immediately after 7 October, such as the artwork featuring messages from Kibbutz Re'im?

**SH:** This is a very powerful way to understand the importance of art. Words are linear, and linear structures lend themselves to hierarchy, whereas